

CBS 2 Chicago, July 18, 2006

A crime that's getting increasing attention involves online sex predators, and are recent series of internet pedophiles found in the Chicago area brings the problem close to home.

Now local lawmakers, along with school and police officials, are tackling the problem head on.

The estimates are frightening, reported NBC5's

[Charlie Wojciechowski](#) . At any given time, there are 50,000 sexual predators online.

That figure and a growing concern for children's safety are now prompting lawmakers to intervene and make sites like xanga.com and myspace.com safer for kids.

They went by the online names of mr.Cre42, and now John Cofield, 44, and John Wentworth, 27, are in custody, accused by Naperville police of trying to have sex with children they met on the social networking Web site myspace.com.

"This is a new unique, 21st century danger to children," said Illinois Rep. Mark Kirk.

That's why Kirk and Rep. Judy Biggert held a meeting in Chicago Monday to press for a proposed the security for children online.

"Myspace.com and other sites are now doing business with tens of millions of American children, and I think that's why they have a higher duty of care," Kirk said.

A Wheeling High School girl was approached by a predator within 45 minutes of creating her Myspace site.

Now, the teen and some of her classmates produced a series of TV ads warning peers about the potential dangers of interacting with strangers online.

Naperville detective Rich Wistocki explained how alleged predators Cofield and Wentworth found their victims, Wojciechowski said.

"They were cruising Myspace and they were sending out close to 50 e-mails a day about how cute this person looked in our jurisdiction, and whoever responded to them, that's the person they spoke with," he said.

Law enforcement says the biggest, newest problem is the proliferation of wireless access points, wi-fi hot spots -- places like Internet cafes and coffee shops. Wojciechowski said a laptop user can go online in one of these spots without ever going into the shop, accessing the Internet from a car or street corner.

The solution, lawmakers say, is to educate parents to get them to keep their kids from posting personal information or pictures online, to move the family computer out of the bedroom and into the living room, to encourage kids to tell them when someone makes them uncomfortable online and remind them that people online may not be who they say they are.

A bill co-sponsored by Kirk and Biggert, the Deleting Online Predators Act, would require schools and libraries to filter social networking sites like Myspace and Zanga.